

# Diary of a planter

COMMENTARY AND SIDEBAR NOTES BY L. MAREN WOOD AND  
DAVID WALBERT

From Henry Harrington Jr. Diary 1826-1824, Henry William Harrington Papers, Collection #314, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## As you read...

Henry W. Harrington, Jr. (b. 1793) was a plantation owner who lived in Richmond County, North Carolina. His plantation, called Beausejour, meaning Pleasant Abode, was 13,000 acres. The plantation was located only a few miles from the South Carolina border, east of the Pee Dee river.

Harrington served in the U.S. Navy during the War of 1812 and was a state legislator who participated in the constitutional convention of 1835. He never married.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What kinds of information did Harrington record in his diary? Why do you suppose he valued this information and chose to record it in his diary?
2. What types of work did Harrington oversee on his plantation?
3. How many different kinds of building projects was Harrington involved in over this six-month period? How do you think these improvements helped his business grow or made his plantation more productive?
4. How did Harrington participate in his community?
5. With whom did Harrington most often socialize?
6. What were the different reasons Harrington traveled to town?
7. Who came to visit Harrington? How did he learn of their arrival? What does this tell us about the way elite planters socialized?
8. What were Harrington's leisure activities?

## January 1852

**Thu. 1st.** My overseer<sup>1</sup> of last year, Jno<sup>2</sup> W. Yaten having left the plantation, yesterday, & Wm<sup>3</sup> Barmer, who I have engaged as overseer for this year having not yet arrived, I am at the plantation attending to business nearly all day.

**Sat. 3rd.** Rode to & about the plantation initiating my new overseer into the regular course of business there.

**Sun. 18th.** At home reading etc. until one o'clock p.m. when intelligence reached me of the murder of Daniel McInnis, at the residence of Jacob Brigman. Rode with A.W. McCaskill, & others, to Brigmans, where I remained until midnight & then returned same way home.

**Mon. 19th.** Wm Powell Esq<sup>4</sup> arrived at Beausejour<sup>5</sup> early this morning, but left again for Rockingham before the arrival of Allen McCaskill Esq with whom I rode up to the old Scotch graveyard on Solomon's creek<sup>6</sup>, where we caused a Grave to be dug for Daniel McInnis; waited until some time after dark for the arrival of the party with the corpse; but they not arriving, we cantered on home the weather being excessively cold.

**Fri. 23rd.** This is a fine winter day, fair but still cold & bracing. I rode down to Knowlanton, thence to new ground west side of Stephens' Spring branch. Return to Knowlanton, thence through Campbell old field to Driggers' branch where John Monroe, with Geo<sup>7</sup> Hinson, Luke<sup>8</sup> & other hands, is hewing timber to rebuild the saw mill. I am at home tonight.

## February 1852

**Tue. 3rd.** Rode down to Campbells Branch where Geo Hinson is with 4 of my men straightening & rebuilding the Causeway<sup>9</sup>, thence to & thru the Gate of the Horsepen Branch, across the south branch of the pen, to & across the Driggers branch, & selected a place for a Causeway to haul some of the Timbers for rebuilding the Saw Mill — Return to Causeway on Campbells' branch & thence home.

**Wed. 4th.** Rode down, very early this morning to the Mills, Sent two of my wagons to Cheraw<sup>10</sup> for the French burr Mill Stones<sup>11</sup>, shipped from Mssers<sup>12</sup> Hart & Munsons' establishment in Utica N.Y. Rode up the Pond to where Geo Hinson & several of my men are still working on the log landing & Campbells' Br Causeway — Continued on through Campbells old field etc home. Rode down to the Mill Pond again this evening. Finished Causeway & raft landing.

**Thu. 5th.** Sister Harriet & Phoebe W arrived at Beausejour last night and returned to Wadesborough<sup>13</sup> today. I rode out thru Campbell old field to Driggers branch where with John Munroe Geo Hinson & six of my men made a Causeway, cut open a road & commenced hauling the very heavy Timbers for rebuilding the Saw Mill. I went with the wagon & Carry log down to the Mill Pond, & then returned, after dark, thru Campbell old field etc home.

**Sat. 7th.** Rode to plantation, this morning, taking the Hounds with me, to the plantation, thence out to Horsepen branch & gave some attention to hauling Mill timbers. Return home. The Rev. Mr. Evander David & wife & Mr. Franklin C. Smith & his wife & Misses Margaret Ann Mathis & Ellen Dens are at Beausejour tonight, as is also Mr. Murdock Morrson.

**Sun. 8th.** Drove up to Providence Meeting in company with the above named persons & heard a sermon by the Rev. Mr. David, & then returned home.

**Fri. 20th.** At home reading etc. My niece Mrs. Charlotte H Powe & her daughter Harriet & sons Thomas & John H made me a visit this evening & are at Beausejour tonight.

## March 1852

**Wed 3rd.** Laid out & staked off the route for the main ditch to drain the Fat Pound Course S 19° 30 s W. Rode out with the hounds by moonshine this cold night.

**Fri. 5th.** At home laying off ground for Apple Trees, reading, etc.

**Tue. 9th.** At home attending to hauling out manure for Cotton & Apple trees.

**Thu. 11th.** Staking off ground for apple trees again this morning — & detained at home the latter part of the day, by company, among others Mr. James Maples of Moore County who is with me tonight.

**Mon 15.** Employed a great part of the day planting Apple Trees.

**Tue. 16th.** Rode Sandhill road<sup>14</sup> to Rockingham to Court. At W P Leaks with Jno C. Baker

**Wed. 17th.** At Rockingham at Court — I am at R. F. Longs tonight.

**Thu. 18th.** At Rockingham at Court — Rode down the Sandhill road home.

**Fri. 19th.** Drove up Sandhill road to Rockingham — Am examined in court as a witness on the part of the State against Jacob Brigman, charged with the murder of Daniel McInnis. Bringman convicted of Manslaughter. I purchased two Mules of William Cray of Washington County Virginia, & then, after dark, returned home.

**Wed. 24th.** At home reading etc. until 12 o'clock, Spent evening with Frank planting Apple Trees.

**Sat. 27th.** With Frank, this evening, finishing planting Apple Trees for this season. Has a short visit from Mr. John F. Pegues, this evening.

**Wed. 31st.** I am at home all day reading, writing etc. I have a cold with hoarseness, cough & irritation in the throat & upper part of the lungs — slight bronchial irritation. This night forty three years since my Father expired in the room in which I am now writing.

## April 1852

**Sat. 3rd.** Cantered down to the Mills, this morning with my Compass & laid off & staked a tail race<sup>15</sup>, from the *[illegible]* now digging out the new Saw Mill frame, thru the swamp & then make an arc South westwardly into the creek — Take a Rifle shot with Col B. F.

Pegues, Wesley Pegues, Ezchiel Coward & Jms M. Smith. Return home & occupy the evening in reading etc.

**Mon. 5th.** At home reading etc. until evening, then rode to the Mills, taking my Gun & Dogs with me & shooting a number of Squirrels by the way. On my return home, after dark, found Dr. F. C. Hall with his sister Mary W, & Miss Lydia Wetmore at Beausejour. I am highly entertained by the fine singing, accompanied on the Guitar, of Mary W. Hall & Lydia Wetmore.

**Tue. 20th.** Rode up Sandhill road, calling at Isaac Halls by the way to the County Court at Rockingham. Obtained an order of Court for building a Bridge over Marks Creek at my Saw Mill on the Cheraw river road. Returned, early this evening, down Sandhill road home.

**Thu. 22.** Finished planting Cotton & Potatoes at Beausejour by 12 oclock & then rode to Knowlanton & thence to the Mills.

**Sat. 24th.** Rode by Campbell old field etc to the Mills — Remained nearly all day there attending to digging Clay (out of the proposed Canal) for puddling<sup>16</sup> the new Saw Mill which puddling I am also carrying on — John Thrower has nearly completed the furrowing & dressing the new French Burr Mill Stones.

**Tue. 27th.** Cantered down to the Mills this morning & remained there until late this evening, attending to digging Clay, Rocks etc, in the proposed Factory Canal, hauling to & filling in between the wings of the Saw Mill etc. John Thrower has at length, after three weeks work on them, Finished the French Burrs.

**Fri 30th.** Rode down to & thru Allen McCaskills' river plantation and Mrs. Pegues' old Parker plantation to Wm. J. Pregues' Fishery between the Mouth of Murke Creek & the old Parker ferry landing. Crossed the river with Wm. J. Segues, examining the Macadamia Nuts etc & taking out the Fish as we went over. Met old Mr. Claudius Pegues & Thomas Pegues, son of James of Chesterfield. Walked over Wm. J. Pegues' Wheat, rye, oats & clover, & returned by my Mills etc home.

## May 1852

**Sun. 2nd.** Mr. Jno Moorman, family & Miss Lucy Ann Pool left us this evening.

**Fri. 7th.** At the Mills all day attending to business there as usual of late.

**Sat. 8th.** Cantered down to the Mills, early this morning & remained there as usual — Raised the upper part of the saw mill, putting all up but the rafters.

**Sun. 9th.** Messrs. Edwin Wade & Britton Hart are with me tonight.

**Thu. 20th.** Rode out, this morning, to & about the plantation inspecting the Crop etc. On returning home about 12 oclock found the Rev. Dr. E. W. Caruthers & Mr. Denny, both of

Guilford County, Spent the evening with them in looking over some of my deceased Fathers' Revolutionary papers.

**Sun. 23rd.** I am at home all day reading etc. My nephew John. W. Harrington is with me tonight.

**Fri. 28th.** Rode out, this morning, taking the Hounds with me, by Fat Pond & Campbell old field, to the Mills — walk down Mars' Creek, on south side of the Horse Bend, Return to the Mills & thence by the Campbell old field home. My nephew Mr. Henry John Harrington, Jr, is with me tonight.

**Sun 30th.** At home all day with Mr. Geo R. Wetmore, who arrived last night & returned home this evening.

## June 1852

**Thu. 10th.** Rode out, this morning, taking the hounds with me, by Nat Rye old field & down old chair road to the low grounds, etc. — little Rock going over the Mountain, finding & chasing a fox. I am at home this evening with company (Jno W. Cameron who called on business & Thos C. Lance. T.C. Lance is with me tonight.)

**Tue. 15th.** Rode up Sandhill road to Rockingham where, after being introduced to Gov. David S. Reid & John Kerr Esq, heard the debate between them on public affairs, they being Candidates for Governor<sup>17</sup> Return same way home.

**Thu. 17th.** Walked out this morning, taking the Hounds with me, by old Avenue, Nat Rye old field, Eagles nest, & Bowl Swam where a servant (Elijah) brot my horse (Bay Ned) to me. Rode thru Hatcher field & by Stephensburg & Driggers place, to Overstreet plantation where my people with Geo Hinson helping them, are harvesting Rye — rode down the Sandhill road home.

**Sat. 26th.** Rode down to the Mills, today where Allen McCaskill, Daniel D. Morrison & Culliver J. Britt Jr., Commissioners<sup>18</sup> appointed for that purpose, let out<sup>19</sup> the building & bridge immediately [illegible] the saw mill. Jno C. Knight were the bidders & the building fell on my hands at \$115.00<sup>20</sup>.

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### Notes

1. Plantation owners hired overseers to supervise the day to day operations of the plantation. Overseers were white men of lesser social standing than plantation owners and were not social

equals with their employers. On a large plantation, slaves had little direct contact with the master and were subject to the orders of the overseer.

2. An abbreviation for John.
3. Abbreviation for William.
4. Esq is an abbreviation for Esquire. In the United States, Esq at the end of a name signifies that the person is licensed to practice law.
5. Beau Sejour was the name of Harrington's plantation. The phrase is French and means Pleasant Abode.
6. Solomons Creek runs through Richmond County about 5 miles southeast of Rockingham.
7. Geo is an abbreviation for George.
8. The fact that Harrington refers to this man by his first name tells us that Luke was African American, most likely a slave. When Harrington refers to white people (men and women), he provides full names. When referring to some white men, Harrington provides abbreviate first names and full last names because elite white men would have been known socially by their surname. But whites addressed African Americans by their first names only, reinforcing their place in the South's social hierarchy.
9. A causeway was a raised road across low or wet ground.
10. Cheraw, South Carolina, is located about 12 miles south of the North Carolina border. Most likely, it was the nearest town to Harrington's plantation.
11. French Burr mill stones were used in watermills to grind wheat into flour. Unlike other types of mill stones that were cut from a single rock, French Burr stones were made of 16 to 20 pieces, cemented and bound together by iron. This method of construction, combined with the use of a fine porous lime or sand stone, resulted in a more effective type of stone that could grind wheat into finer flour. French Burr stones came from the Marne Valley in northern France.
12. Messers is plural for Mister.
13. Wadesborough was about 15 to 20 miles northwest of Harrington's plantation.
14. Sandhill road runs parallel to U.S. Route 1. It crosses Solomons creek about five miles south of Rockingham.
15. A mill-race is the channel in which water runs to a watermill. The *tail-race* is the part of the mill-race below the wheel.
16. Clay *puddling* was clay of a loose consistency used for building. The clay being dug from the canal's path may have been used as mortar for the sawmill.
17. David Reid was re-elected as governor in 1852.
18. Commissioners are people appointed by a government or community to oversee a specific task.
19. *Let* in this context means to rent.
20. Three men were appointed — most likely by the county government — to oversee a public auction of the building and bridge. Harrington, who won the auction against other bidders, won

only the right to rent the building and bridge, and the money he paid most likely went to the county government.

## Contributors

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David holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Garden Spot: Lancaster County, the Old Order Amish, and the Selling of Rural America*, published in 2002 by Oxford University Press. With LEARN NC, he has written numerous articles for K–12 teachers on topics such as historical education, visual literacy, writing instruction, and technology integration.